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INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 001728

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [SOCI](#) [GR](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: GREEK FM URGES ACTIVE EU ROLE IN GAZA CONFLICT,
WHILE GREEK LEFT TURNS ITS IRE ON U.S. ISRAELI EMBASSIES

REF: A. ATHENS 1720
[1](#)B. ATHENS 1692

Classified By: A/DCM THOMAS MILLER. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Events in Gaza temporarily pushed domestic concerns, such as anarchist violence, the Vatopaidion scandal, and economic troubles, off Greek front pages, giving the Karamanlis government a much-needed breather after weeks of bruising criticism and declining poll figures (reftels). FM Bakoyannis issued a statement that blamed Hamas for triggering the violence with its rocket attacks but placed greater emphasis on the devastating effects of Israel's "disproportionate response." She said Greece was prepared to take an active role in EU efforts to find a solution. Bakoyannis was scheduled to travel to Brussels today to attend the emergency session of EU FMs. The Greek left and Palestinian residents in Greece reacted strongly to the events in Gaza. 500 mostly Arab protesters pelted the police and Israeli Embassy with rocks, while 1,500 Greek Communist Party protesters marched on the U.S. Embassy, burned American flags, and chanted anti-Obama and anti-Bush slogans. END SUMMARY.

BAKOYANNIS CONDEMNS ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE

[1](#)2. (SBU) FM Bakoyannis took the GOG public lead on the Gaza crisis, issuing a statement on December 28 that blamed Hamas for triggering the violence with its rocket attacks but placed greater emphasis on the devastating effects of Israel's "disproportionate response." (Bakoyannis' statement is re-printed in full in para 7 below.) She expressed deep concern and condemned the escalation of violence, which was "destroying the hope of bringing peace to this tormented part of the world." She said the international community could not remain idle and had to take several (vaguely defined) "initiatives" to defuse the situation, such as halting the cycle of violence, providing humanitarian assistance to the affected Palestinian areas, and stepping up diplomatic efforts to push forward the Peace Process. Greece supported the position of the EU Presidency and was ready to contribute to finding a solution, as well as to providing humanitarian aid as soon as feasible. Bakoyannis was scheduled to travel to Brussels today to attend the informal meeting of EU foreign ministers dealing with the crisis.

PROTESTS TARGET U.S., ISRAELI EMBASSIES

[1](#)3. (SBU) The Greek left and Palestinian residents in Greece reacted strongly to the events in Gaza. A mostly Arab demonstration outside the Israeli Embassy began at about 16:00 and was coordinated by the Greek-Palestinian Friendship Association. The demonstration, which Police estimates put at 500 participants, quickly turned violent, as protesters pelted the police and the embassy with rocks, to which the

police responded with tear gas.

¶4. (SBU) Later, a larger but generally less violent demonstration sponsored by the Greek Communist Party (KKE) began at the War Museum downtown, then proceeded to the U.S. Embassy, where American flags were burnt and protesters shouted "either with Obama or Bush, the Americans are killing people." The KKE demonstrators then advanced north the mile or so to the Israeli Embassy, where they joined up with other demonstrators from the new-left SYRIZA coalition and the remnants of the earlier Arab protest. Throughout the demonstrations, police cordoned off the area near the Israeli Embassy, disrupting traffic on the main Kifisias artery. The police provided a contingent of three busses of anti-riot officers for the protection of the U.S. Embassy.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) The Israeli attacks in Gaza pushed domestic concerns, such as anarchist violence, the Vatopaidion scandal, and economic troubles, off Greek front pages, giving the Karamanlis government a much-needed breather after weeks of bruising criticism and declining poll figures. This is likely only a temporary respite, however, given already-planned student general strikes scheduled for January ¶9. We are also concerned about the approaching two-year anniversary of the RPG attack on the U.S. Embassy on January ¶12. While Greek terrorist groups have not previously timed their attacks with major anniversaries, Revolutionary Struggle, which claimed responsibility for the 2007 RPG attack, cited its solidarity with Middle Eastern terror

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groups. The situation in the Middle East now is even more acute, and there has been an up-tick in recent weeks in gun violence directed against police. The Embassy is monitoring the situation closely and remains in close contact with the Greek police.

¶6. (C) On the events in Gaza, the GOG has said in the past that it wanted to take a more active role in the Peace Process and offered to host a round of negotiations in Greece. The MFA has also told us in the past that Greece was willing to contribute troops to an EU PKO in Gaza, if ever such a force were formed. Bakoyannis' December 28 statement did not specifically mention troops or a peace-keeping operation, but Greece could probably be expected to play a fairly active role in some kind of EU mission, particularly a humanitarian relief operation. END COMMENT.

FM BAKOYANNIS STATEMENT

¶7. (U) BEGIN TEXT OF FM BAKOYANNIS DECEMBER 28 STATEMENT ON EVENTS IN GAZA:

We express our deep concern and we condemn the extreme escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip, which cost hundreds of Palestinian civilians their lives.

We agree with the statement of the EU Presidency on these tragic events.

The Hamas rockets that triggered a new round of violence and Israel's disproportionate response through air strikes and bombings are not only killing and wounding people but also destroying the hope of bringing peace to this tormented part of the world. They are putting the region's extremely fragile security at immediate risk.

In the midst of the current global financial crisis, the flare-up of violence in the Middle East is a nightmare that we have to avoid at all costs.

The international community bears an enormous responsibility.

It cannot remain idle. It has to take initiatives immediately in order to defuse this tension.

-- The vicious cycle of violence must be brought to an end.

-- International humanitarian assistance must be given as soon as possible to those affected in Gaza.

-- There must be more intensive diplomatic efforts in order to protect and push forward the Middle East Peace Process.

We welcome the extraordinary session of the UN Security Council.

The European Union, for its part, has to take its own leading role.

Greece, which always condemns all forms of violence and terrorism, is ready to contribute to this effort. It is also ready to provide humanitarian aid as soon as this is feasible.

END TEXT OF BAKOYANNIS STATEMENT
SPECKHARD